

**State Planning Office
WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS
Week ending February 22, 2008**

State law assigns four core duties to the State Planning Office that include: 1) conducting continuing economic analysis, including economic forecasting, 2) coordinating the development of the State's economy and energy resources with the conservation of its natural resources; 3) providing technical assistance to towns and regions; and 4) providing technical assistance to the Governor and Legislature by undertaking special studies and plans and preparing policy alternatives.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Governor's Council on Maine's Quality of Place

February 26, 2008 - 1:00 PM - 4:30 PM Cabinet Room, Capitol Building, Augusta

CONTACT: [Linda LaPlante](#) at 287-6077

Community Preservation Advisory Committee

February 27, 2008 - 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM Cross Office Building, Room 300, Augusta, Maine

CONTACT: [Sue Inches](#) at 287-2989

MAINE COASTAL PROGRAM

Jim Connors to testify before Congressional subcommittee. On February 28, 2008, Jim Connors has been invited to testify before the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife and Oceans, which is holding a legislative oversight hearing on four bills: H.R. 3223 (Allen, D-ME), Keep Our Waterfronts Working Act of 2007; H.R. 5451 (Bordallo, D-GU), the Coastal Zone Reauthorization Amendments of 2008; H.R. 5452 (Capps, D-CA), the Coastal States Renewable Energy Promotion Act; and, H.R. 5453 (Capps, D-CA). Jim's testimony will focus specifically on the working waterfronts bill and will discuss the requirements for the development of state working waterfront plans and the application process for project grants. **CONTACT: Jim Connors at 287-8938 or jim.connors@maine.gov**

ECONOMICS & DEMOGRAPHICS

December retail sales released. State total retail sales for December decreased 6.1% compared to December 2006. The decrease in total sales was led by an 8.4% decrease in the general merchandise category, which contains department stores and other general merchandise stores. For the month, the category accounted for 23% of all sales. The business operating and lodging sectors were up 2.3% and 1.4%, respectively, while all other sectors reported lower December sales than the same month last year. For the year total sales were up 0.8% over 2006. The personal consumption category, which excludes sales between businesses, ended the year up 0.4%. The annual increases reflect increases in the food, auto transport, restaurant and lodging categories that were offset by lower year-over-year sales in the building supply and other retail categories.

December 2007 Retail Sales

	% Change From Dec 2006 to Dec 2007	% Change 2006 to 2007
Building. Supply	-12.6%	-4.4%
Food Store	-1.3%	2.8%
General Merchandise.	-8.4%	1.2%
Other Retail	-4.6%	-0.5%
Restaurant	-9.3%	3.0%
Lodging	1.4%	7.8%
Auto Transportation	-8.2%	4.1%
Total	-6.1%	0.8%
Business Operating	2.3%	3.8%
Personal Consumption	-7.6%	0.4%

Source: Maine Revenue Services

The taxable retail sales data is available for download on the State Planning Office website at <http://www.maine.gov/spo/economics/economics/retailsales.php>. **CONTACT: David Douglass at 287-1478 or david.douglass@maine.gov**

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

CEO training attracts large attendance. More than 170 code officers and local plumbing inspectors across the state have registered for the CEO training session on “*Dealing with Difficult People*.” Code enforcement officers enforce state policy and procedures and many times have to deliver bad news to clients with many different personalities. This workshop provides strategies for managing conflicts, discussion and practice for getting an “A” with angry customers, and identifies tips for delivering bad news. Sessions have been held in South Portland, Orono, and Lewiston and next week the last session is scheduled in Presque Isle. To date the overwhelming majority of attendees rated the session as “excellent.” **CONTACT: Lana Clough at 287-8056 or lane.clough@maine.gov**

Recycling staff travels to Caribou. Sam Morris, a senior planner with the waste management and recycling program, traveled to Caribou on February 21 to deliver a presentation and discuss household hazardous waste options for Aroostook County at the Northern Maine Development Commission offices. NMDC has provided support and leadership on solid waste issues for County communities for many years through its support and staffing of the “Garbage Group,” an association of solid waste and recycling professionals working in county towns and cities. NMDC has organized household hazardous waste collections in several county locations and the “group” is looking into the best way to provide the service to residents on a more permanent basis. **CONTACT: Sam Morris at 287-8054 or sam.morris@maine.gov**

GOVERNOR’S OFFICE OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND SECURITY

Heating fuel prices rise again. The Office of Energy Independence and Security's February 19, 2008 survey of home heating oil prices found the current statewide average cash price for No. 2 heating oil to be up by \$.08 since the last week at \$3.28 per gallon and \$.95 higher than last year at this time. The statewide kerosene price average is up by \$0.08 since last week at \$3.69 per gallon and \$.95 higher than last year at this time. The propane price survey found the statewide average to be \$2.94 per gallon which is \$0.01 less than last week and \$0.56 higher than last year at this time.

Three factors came together to push the price of crude oil up over the course of the last week despite macroeconomic indicators pointing to a slowing economy. The first is a steady decline in the international buying power of the dollar. All oil is traded in dollars, so as the dollar drops the price of oil climbs. The second factor is a concern that OPEC will cut its production quotas at their meetings at the beginning of March. The final factor is an explosion at a major oil refinery on the Gulf Coast.

The Office conducts a weekly survey of home heating oil, kerosene, and propane prices from November through March. For more information:

<http://www.maineenergyinfo.com/oil/index.html>. **CONTACT: Ian Burnes at 287-8927 or ian.burnes@maine.gov**